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## THE ARABIC LIFE OF ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS\*

BY

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\*) Abbreviations used in this article:

BACHA = Constantin BACHA, *Biographie de Saint Jean Damascène, Texte original arabe*, Harissa, Imprimerie Grecque Melchite de St. Paul, 1912.

GRAF, *Vita* = Georg GRAF, «Das arabische Original der Vita des hl. Johannes von Damascus», in *Der Katholik*, 12 (1913) 164-190, 320-331.

GRIFFITH, *Images* = Sidney H. GRIFFITH, «Theodore Abu Qurrah's Arabic tract on the Chistian practice of venerating images», in *JAOS* 105 (1985) 53-73.

KAZHDAN-GERO = A. KAZHDAN - Stefan GERO, «Kosmas of Jerusalem, A more critical approach to his biography», in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 82 (1989) 122-32.

## A. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

With this article we make available to scholars and readers a version of St. John of Damascus's biography, the so-called St. John's *Vita Arabica*, whose translation into English we will carry out<sup>1</sup>. This is not the first time that this specific version has been translated, however, the existing translations in western languages are not the most readily available ones for readers and scholars nowadays. One of the existing translations was made into Russian<sup>2</sup> and the other one into German, in Gothic typography<sup>3</sup>. For our translation we were able to make use of the German translation, whose introduction and footnotes were found useful. But we did not have access to the Russian translation.

We will give here also an account of the life and works of St. John, according to the existing literature, and an exposition of the problem of the original version of his biography. We try to add the corresponding notes to the Arabic text, while trying to put it in its historical context.

However, the researcher of St. John's life always finds the same obstacle, the lack of faithful data, of any kind of data. This obstacle can be observed in the *Vita Arabica* also, and we have to conclude that the aim of such a biography was not what we understand nowadays by realism or accuracy, concerning St. John's life.

### I. LIFE OF ST. JOHN ACCORDING TO THE EXISTING LITERATURE

#### 1. *His Childhood*

Yūḥannā b. Manṣūr b. Sarḡūn, born in the second part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, probably in 675, was the son of the secretary of the High Office of Finance and "Logothete", chief representative of his people at the Caliph's court. His son, Yūḥannā, would succeed him in both capacities after his death.

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1) I am grateful to Fr. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, who proposed this project to me and made available the material for this work. I am grateful also to Fr. Samir Khalil SAMIR, who encouraged me to bring it to an end.

2) A. A. VASILJEV, *Arabskaja versia žitija sv. Joanna Damaskina*, St. Petersburg, 1913.

3) GRAF, *Vita*.

There is a tradition handed down by the Melkite Patriarch Eutychius of Alexandria, who reports that the name Sargūn is associated with the capitulation of the city of Damascus in the year 635 and this source makes the formal charge of treason against Sargūn. The question is why the name of St. John's father was condemned in such a way, without any consideration to his son's name, who stood in such high honor in the Church. At this point we may question if this Sargūn was really St. John's father.

## 2. *His Education*

St. John may have been a companion of the future Caliph Yazid II, son of ʿAbd al-Malik, who reigned from 720 to 724. Moreover, he was probably acquainted with the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705) and his son al-Walid (705-715). It is less probable that he was still in Damascus during the reign of Sulaymān (715-717) and ʿUmar II (717-720). ʿAziz Suryal ʿAṭīyya<sup>4</sup> tells us that he participated in debates of Christians and Muslims in presence of the Caliphs and that he must have met the Christian poet Laureate al-Aḥṭal, one of the famous literary trio of early Arab poets, together with al-Farazdaq and Ǧarir.

St. John received a solid Greek education besides an education in Arabic and Islam. The Greek education is said to have been received from Cosmas the Elder, a monk from Calabria or Sicily, who was captured by the Arabs and ransomed by St. John's father. Another Cosmas, not to be confused with this one, is Cosmas the Younger<sup>5</sup>, an orphan adopted by St. John's father, brought up and tutored by Cosmas the Elder<sup>6</sup>, together with St. John, who became bishop of Māyūmā, near Ǧazzah, later in 742.

## 3. *Monk in St. Saba Monastery*

Due to the anti-Christian policy of ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705) St. John joined, together with Cosmas the Younger, the monks in St. Saba monastery around the year 700. Both were noted as monks and melodians in the celebrated St. Sabas. The patriarch of Jerusalem would ordain him priest around 725, when the Iconoclastic controversies began. At that time we find St.

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4) Aziz S. ATIYA, «St. John Damascene. Survey of the Unpublished Arabic Versions of his Work in Sinai», apud George MAKDISI, *Arabic and Islamic Studies in honor of Hamilton A.R. GIBB*, Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1965.

5) See below. Footnote in translated text.

6) See below. Footnote in translated text.

John in Palestine speaking as a priest and representative of John V, Patriarch of Jerusalem. He was, then, contemporary of the Byzantine Emperors Leo the Isaurian (717-41) and Constantine Copronymo (741-775) during whose reigns the Iconoclastic Movement split the whole Christian world.

From the acts of the Iconoclast synod of Hieria in 754, we learn of the anathematization of three main defendants of images, namely Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (d.733), George, Metropolitan of Cyprus (d.754) and Maṣṣūr, our St. John, spelled in Greek Manseros, which means in this language bastard. He is cursed as favorer of the Saracens, traitorous worshiper of images and disloyal to the Empire.

#### *4. His Death and his Canonization*

Siméon Vailhé was able to determine the exact date of the death of St. John on the basis of the details of the Life of St. Stephen, a monk at St. Sabas and nephew of St. John. Stephen died on March 31, 794, at the age of 69, he had entered in the monastery at the age of ten and he lived at the side of his uncle for 15 years. Then St. John would have died in 749 and the day of his death was, perhaps, December 4<sup>th</sup>.

However, with the exception that St. John was a priest and monk in St. Sabas Monastery and that he became a prominent figure in the iconoclastic controversy, in addition to his far-reaching reputation as a preacher, leaving us numerous scholarly works witnessing his encyclopedic erudition, all other data are based on conjectures<sup>7</sup>.

As early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Theophanes, the chronographer, honors him as a Saint, and bestows upon him the epithet of "Golden-streamed". Since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, his name appears on the Synaxaria on November 29<sup>th</sup> or on December 4<sup>th</sup>. St. John is the patron Saint for students of Oriental Studies.

Globally, his life coincides with the reigns of the Umayyads in Damascus, since he probably was born shortly after Mu'āwīya's death (661-668) and died during the reign of Marwān II (744-750). In that sense, we can say that he represents an epoch, that of the first years of organization and expansion of the new born Islamic Empire.

While his father was still a product of the Islamic Conquest, and for that reason engrossing the cadres of the Islamic administration, which used

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7) C. N. TSIRPANLIS, «The saints' Message», in *Orthodox Thought and Life* 4 (1987) 32.

the human resources of the conquered country until their own were developed, with St. John this policy showed its limits. We can think that St. John may have refused to accommodate himself to the system, so that he had to seek for a better place to serve God and people in a monastic life. His life ends also with the end of a period of Islamic history, that of the Umayyads, he will not be the witness of a more powerful and sophisticated Empire under the Abbasids.

## II. ST. JOHN IN HIS HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT. THE ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY

### 1. *St John and the iconoclastic controversy*

The iconoclastic controversy, that began in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with the Byzantine emperor Leo III (717-741) and continued with his successor Constantine V (741-775), cannot be considered in isolation from the christological controversies of the preceding centuries in the Christian world. Outside of Byzantium, where the iconoclastic crisis produced a spate of books and letters on the subject during its century of existence, there was nothing much written about icons except in Palestine, in the monastery of Mar Sabas by St. John of Damascus, who wrote in Greek, and in Syrian, by the erstwhile monk of Mar Sabas, Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 760 - c. 830), St. John's spiritual follower, a Melkite, who wrote in Arabic, in a milieu where there had never been any Christian iconoclasm, but Jews and Muslim iconoclasm<sup>8</sup>.

The three tracts on the topic, *Contra imaginum calumniatores*, written by St. John of Damascus<sup>9</sup>, are intended to defend the use and veneration of images as an extension of a most essential of Christian teachings, that of the doctrine of Incarnation. The veneration of images is a result of the Incarnation, that broke the wall of separation between God and man when the Infinite consented to become circumscribed. Therefore, the material flesh of

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8) Theodore Abū Qurrah's tract on icons was completely unknown in Byzantium. In fact during his time the Church in the East did not communicate with the Church in Byzantium. In his work there is no contribution of ideas on the topic. His contribution consists in expressing in Arabic what St. John had expressed in Greek in order to meet the needs of his contemporary Christians who were more exposed to Muslim and Jewish arguments on the topic than the preceding generation. On Jewish and Muslim controversy on images, cf. GRIFFITH, *Images*.

9) Introduction by D. ANDERSON to *St. John of Damascus, On the Divine images*, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminar Press (1980) 7.

Jesus Christ became part of His divine person, the invisible was made visible, and henceforth it is a good and praiseworthy thing to depict Him as He is, God who became man.

St. John's writing provides the Orthodox response to the iconoclastic theologians, who based their opposition to the images on the severe condemnation of idolatry in the Old Testament, as well as an understanding of images as being always one in essence with their prototypes, therefore every image is an idol. Furthermore, the iconoclasts seemed to be little concerned with the historical Jesus, speaking of a divinity devoid of all human characteristics. In this way they approach the heresy of Eutyches, who spoke of the humanity of Christ as a mere drop in the ocean of His divinity, or of Origine, who taught that Christians ought to contemplate God in the purity of their hearts and not use images of the past.

St. John of Damascus (d. 749), Nicephorus of Constantinople (d. 828), Theodore the Studite (d. 826), and others, saw in these arguments an incomplete understanding of the Mystery of the Incarnation. St. John's treatises bring us, based on the Scripture, the distinction between absolute worship, or adoration and relative worship, or veneration<sup>10</sup>, of which icons are supposed to be objects.

Although he wrote in Greek and his *Contra imaginum calumniatores*, enjoyed wide popularity in Byzantium, we may consider that he lived in political isolation from Constantinople, from the Byzantine Empire. From his monastery of St. Sabas, in Palestine, in Muslim territory, he was saved from the persecution raging within the Empire against those who defended the images.

## 2. St. John trapped between two empires, the Byzantine and the Islamic one

However, according to the *Vita Arabica*, the hand of the Byzantine Emperor was able to grasp him in some way. In the *Vita Arabica* we are told that the Emperor managed to accuse him before the Caliph of having tried to betray the Caliph and break the pact of *Ahl al-Dimma*, or non-Muslims under Islam, since he tried to instigate the Byzantines to invade Muslim territory and gave them information about the military weak points of the Muslims. For such a crime Islamic law penalizes with death or exile, since that means that the non-Muslim broke the Pact with the Muslims through which

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10) *Ibidem*, p. 8.

they had obtained the right to stay in Muslim territory together with protection of their lives and property under Muslim rule<sup>11</sup>.

The *Vita Arabica* introduces here a certainly popular legend telling us that the Caliph condemned him ordering to cut his hand. But we have to assume here that the cut of the hand is more symbolic than real, meaning the loss of his power and influence before the Caliph. We may ask here if his entry into the monastery was not a direct consequence of falling in disgrace in the Caliph's eyes and, in a way, replaced the alternative of exile.

Nevertheless, it is clear in the *Vita Arabica* that St. John is trapped between two fires, that of the two empires, the Byzantine and the Islamic one. In fact, we may have to assume that St. John's treaties were aimed against both empires at the same time through his defense of the divine images, since Islam is also an iconoclast religion and St. John considered Islam more as a heresy than as a religion itself. Besides that many Christians leaned towards iconophobia, as a symptom of a more generalized tendency that pervaded the Arab Christian community, that of accommodation of the conquered people to the Islamic dominant culture.

### 3. Moslem policy of eliminating Christians from the administration

As S. Griffith<sup>12</sup> mentions, St. John's concern was not only the iconoclast controversy but the defense of the faith as a whole, "it seems likely that the Islamic conquest, which claimed Palestine definitively in the year 638, was a major factor among the circumstances which prompted John to produce a compendium of the faith in the first place, along with an epitome of the ecclesiastical philosophy which supported it. The need for a convincing apologetic in the face of a strong non-Christian intellectual challenge had not been so strong since the days of the early Greek apologists".

In relation to St. John's political position towards Islam, the existing biographical literature tells us that due to the anti-Christian policy of 'Abd al-Malik, St. John decides to join the monastery of St. Saba. As mentioned before, St. John represents an epoch, that of the Umayyad caliphs, since his life coincides with the reign of the dynasty. But while Mu'āwīya I, in part, impelled by necessity and pragmatism was on good terms with the Christians, having in his court the Christian Sargūn b. Manšūr, supposedly St.

11) Antoine FATTAL, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam*, Beirut, Imprimerie Catholique (1958) 83.

12) GRIFFITH, *Images*, pp. 53-54.



John's father, as financial counselor, things will change for the following generation of Christians. We have seen how St. John decided or was obliged to leave the court.

Indeed, Mu'āwīya had gained the favor of his Christian subjects living in the city of Damascus, among them, and not in a city of new foundation. Even he shared divine services under the same roof. This tolerance remains in the memory of Christians as we find to be mentioned in their writings, even in countries as away as Spain. But he was more a *sayyid*, a tribal chief, than a ruler.

With 'Abd al-Malik things changed. He started to organize the Islamic state. He minted his own money, with the Islamic profession of faith as inscription, since, until then, Byzantine money had been current in the Arab Empire. In that way he emerged as an absolute ruler, giving influence to the muslim theologian and restricting that of the Christians, as a means of insuring the unity of the empire.

His son, Walid I, continues the policy of eliminating Christians from the administrative apparatus, and dispensed with the services of the family of Sarḡūn b. Maṣṣūr, which since the time of Mu'āwīya had been in control of financial affairs.

We may consider the possibility that it was during Walid's reign and not that of his father, that St. John left the court for St. Saba's monastery. We know of a concrete action carried out by Walid against the Christians, in 705 Walid took the church of St. John the Baptist from the Christians to join it to his projected huge mosque of Damascus<sup>13</sup>. But his most drastic change was to enforce the use of Arabic in public administration. The Syriac chronicle *Ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* reports "Walid, the king of Tayyaye, ordered that in his chancery, i.e. the treasury, which these Tayyaye call the diwan, one should not write in Greek, but in the Arabic language, because up to that time the ledgers of the kings of the Tayyaye were in Greek"<sup>14</sup>.

Regarding 'Umar II, whom St. John may not have known personally, there is contradictory news of how he handled the Christians. On one side, he tried to reconcile, ceding the Church of St. Thomas in reward for the loss of St. John the Baptist's church. On the other side, Islamic tradition attrib-

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13) Carl BROCKELMANN, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp.73-93.

14) GRIFFITH, *Images*, p. 64.

utes to him<sup>15</sup> the Covenant or Pact in relation to *Ahl al-Dimma*, a strong discriminatory document, although the authenticity of this document as issued in a 12<sup>th</sup> century version by al-Turtuṣī, according to scholars<sup>16</sup>, is doubtful.

In conclusion, about St. John's political stand versus Islam, we may say that the period of conquest leaves way to the consolidation of Islamic power, the tribal system to the state system, and the Christians lose their influential role in the new Islamic society, while others tried to accommodate to the new dominant culture. St. John witnessed this process and found his way out in his monastic life, from where, through his writings, he could still serve God, the people and the Church.

### III. HIS WORKS

#### 1. Liturgical and exegetical writings

To St. John we owe the greater part of the *Octocchus* or book of the eight tones, still read in the Eastern Church. He is noted as one of the greatest hymnologists of all times. He wrote also sermons and exegeses. Some important sermons are *Sabbatum sanctum*, *the Transfiguration*, *the Dormition of the Virgin*, *the Nativity of the Virgin*.

#### 2. Ascetic and hagiographic writings

He demonstrated his monumental erudition in the *Sacra Parallela*, an accumulation of scriptural and patristic material which he compiled and organized for moralistic purposes largely lost. He devoted some of his ascetic works to St. Athanasius, St. Barbara, St. John Chrysostomo and Elias. The ascetic tale of *Barlaam and Josaphat* has been ascribed to him, through Pahlevi texts. The citation is made by Ibn al-Nadīm in *Kitāb al-Fihrist* of *Kitāb al-Budd* and *K. Būdāsaf*.

#### 3. Polemical writings

Against nestorians he wrote *Contra haeresim nestorianorum* and *Sermo de fide contra Nestorium*. Against monophysites he wrote *Tractatus contra Iacobitas*, but the most important of these works is against the iconoclast, *Orationes de sanctis imaginibus*.

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15) The most spread traditions attribute the Pact to Umar I and not to Umar II.

16) Antoine FATTAL, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam*, Beirut, Imprimerie Catholique (1958) 66-68.

#### 4. Dogmatic writings

However, his greatest contribution is represented by his immense composition of systematic theology entitled "*Fount of Knowledge*", in which for the first time he applied the Aristotelian categories to matters of Christian dogma and doctrine. The outcome was an imposing trilogy in which he organized all the theological learning of his time on a philosophical basis.

The first volume was the *Kephalaia Philosophika* and the *Dialectica*, where he sought support from Aristotle to prove his thesis. The second was a *Compendium of Heresies* where he quoted the older work of Epiphaneus on the subject and added Islam and Iconoclasm. The third was *An Accurate Summary of the Orthodox Faith*, destined to become the accepted definition of Christian Orthodoxy by subsequent generations.

In 1150 Pope Eugenius commissioned John Burgundio of Pisa to translate into Latin so authoritative a work. And it was through this channel that St. John must have influenced medieval scholastic thought. The thesis that he left an influence on Islamic thought through his apologetic debating at the Caliph's court, and that his logic was instrumental in the development of the Qadariyya school, is an interesting thesis that deserves further research<sup>17</sup>.

#### IV. THE PROBLEM OF THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF ST. JOHN'S BIOGRAPHY

The life of St. John of Damascus was first known to us through the *Vita Graeca* of John of Jerusalem<sup>18</sup> dated in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (a fragment in the *Vindobonensis phil. gr. 158* and *Athon. Vatop. 497*)<sup>19</sup>, who recognizes having used as his source a *Vita Arabica*. This *Vita Arabica* has not been preserved.

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17) ATIYA (see note 4).

18) Sometimes also called from Antioch. We follow the references given by:

- GCAL II (1947) 69-70.

- J. M. HOECK, «Stand und Aufgaben der Damaskenos-Forschung», in OCP 17 (1951) 5-60, here 6-13.

- Bernard FLUSIN, «De l'arabe au grec, puis au géorgien: une vie de Saint Jean Damascène», apud *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen-Âge, Actes du colloque international du CNRS, Paris, 1986*, pp. 51-55.

19) For the Greek transmission see Maurizio GORDILLO, *Damascenica. I. Vita Marciana*, coll. «Orientalia Christiana», VIII, 2, Rome, 1926; see also Martin JUGIE, *Une nouvelle Vie et un nouvel écrit de St Jean Damascène*, in *Échos d'Orient* 28 (1929) 35-41, esp. 35-36; and the review of this article by Albert EHRHARD, in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 29 (1929) 407-418. See also Martin JUGIE, *La vie de saint Jean Damascène*, in *Échos d'Orient* 23 (1924) 137-161.

However C. Bacha found and edited<sup>20</sup> a *Vita Arabica*<sup>21</sup> whose author is Michael<sup>22</sup>, monk and priest in St. Simeon, a monastery near Antioch. Although this biography is dated December 1085, there is the possibility that Michael the monk had taken the original *Vita Arabica* and added the preface, where he gives us the date and where he explains the reasons of writing the life of St. John. The reason<sup>23</sup> for Michael to write was the liberation of the prisoners of city, he himself being one of them, from the Turks on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1084, feast of St. John of Damascus and St. Barbara, to whom he entrusted himself in prayers. Michael affirms not having found any biography of the Saint, what led him to gather the existing news, so that the life of St. John would be read every year in his feast.

However, we know of the existence of a Greek biography<sup>24</sup>, similar in content to that of Michael, where it is said that the *Vita Arabica* was used as primary source, dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a date that it is difficult to refute. For that reason, we may have to consider Michael's words either a lie, intending to make this work his own, or, probably more accurate, the result of having edited a previous work, which during this period of anonymous enterprises and non-individual tasks allows anyone to appropriate and attribute himself a work.

So, if this epilog does not belong to the original version, which may be to a certain extent supported by the fact that the epilog is missing in two of the three existing manuscripts<sup>25</sup>, and Michael appropriated the original version, the problem of the original version of St. John's Life is solved and C. Bacha would be right to entitle his edition of the *Vita Arabica* the original version.

20) See BACHA.

21) This is the version translated by G. GRAF into German. The beginning of this *Vita Arabica* appears in Arabic for the first time in *Al-Durr al-muntahab fī ta'rīḥ mamlakat Ḥalab*, Beirut, Sarkis, 1909, a History of Aleppo attributed incorrectly to Ibn Šihna (d.1485).

22) His reference in GCAL II (1947) 69-70. [See now NASRALLAH, HMLEM, III 1 (1983) 334-336 (SAMIR)].

23) We should not forget St. John's historical role as official representative to the Caliph for the Christian community, which it may also be the reason for Michael to pray to him and later to write his Arabic life.

24) From John VI of Jerusalem, although it could be also from John VIII (before 1156) or from John of Antioch (c. 1098). In the later case C. Bacha's edition would be the original version of St. John's life. However, Georg GRAF, tells us that according to the results of a paleographical investigation the Greek manuscript of *Wien, Phil. Gr. 158* is dated in the 10<sup>th</sup> century; see GCAL II (1947) 70.

25) See below under Manuscripts.

On the other hand, there is also a later translation of this particular Arabic version of St. John's life into Greek and from Greek into Georgian. According to Ephrem the Minor, monk and priest of a Georgian monastery near Antioch, as he relates in a preface to his own translation of the Life of John of Damascus, Michael's *Vita Arabica* was translated into Greek and adorned (*sheamko*)<sup>26</sup> by Samuel, metropolitan of Adana. Ephrem the Minor himself, who died in 1103, translated Samuel's *Vita Graeca*, not preserved today<sup>27</sup>, into Georgian<sup>28</sup>.

If these data are accurate, then the translation from Arabic into Greek into Georgian must have been performed within a very short period of time, 1085-1103. The three writers, Michael, Samuel and Ephrem would have been contemporaries and lived in the same region, near Antioch. Ephrem tells us about the important library of the St. Simeon monastery, where he used to go to use and compare the commentaries on Psalms and the writings on ascetic life. So, we can conclude that this Library was the center of intellectual life in Antioch and the writers worked in the same place and intellectual environment during the second part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Scholars until now have trusted the date and words of Michael's *Vita Arabica* and John of Jerusalem, who claimed to have translated the *Vita Graeca* from Arabic, assuming that there were two *Vita Arabica*, one dated before or in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the other from 1085<sup>29</sup>. But against that theory speaks the similarity in content of the *Vita Graeca* and the 1085 dated *Vita Arabica*, which indicates a common source.

The question here is whether the original version of the *Vita Arabica* dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> century or the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>30</sup>. We would have to

26) According to FLUSIN (*supra*, note 18), on Ephrem's words: «The Arabic biography was translated into Greek and adorned, while the Georgian version was a translation of the Greek», which reflects the status quo of the three languages and cultures in ecclesiastical and Christian environment. While the Arabic language and version of the biography needed to be adorned and translated into an elegant Greek style, the Georgian, trying to affirm their own identity with their own literary work, keeps faithful to the Greek translation, showing in that way their identity and at the same time the respect for the Canon and orthodoxy of the Greek Church.

27) Unless this was the *Vita Graeca* attributed to John of Jerusalem or John of Antioch.

28) A Georgian translation from the *Vita Arabica* was edited and translated by K. KEKELIDZE, in *Christianskij Vostok* 3 (1914) 119-174. M. JUGIE affirms (in *Echos d'Orient* 23, 1929, p. 36) this translation being directly from Arabic, not from Greek. Cf. GCAL II (1947) 69-70, n. 3.

29) KAZHDAN- GERO.

30) See GCAL II (1947) 69-70 (SAMIR).

reach to the conclusion that there is no biography of St. John, no original version before the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and this is the version edited by C. Bacha. This date seems very late for a first biography of St. John, but it would explain the words of Michael, who complains about the lack of news about such a person.

## V. MANUSCRIPTS

The edition made by C. Bacha is titled "Texte original arabe", but as P. Peteers says<sup>31</sup>, the statement has not been proven. The manuscripts used for C. Bacha's edition are the following<sup>32</sup>:

1. An old manuscript from Ḥomṣ, lacking the first and the last page.
2. A manuscript from Kafr-Buhum, near Ḥamāh, written by Gabriel, Ḥamāh archbishop's grandson, in 1646.
3. The manuscript *Vatican Arabic* 79, written by Poemen, a monk from Saba, who accomplished his work in Damascus in 1223.

The edition from C. Bacha, although based on the Vatican manuscript and completed with the other two manuscripts, lacks a critical edition annotating the variants on the manuscripts. The content of this *Vita Arabica* corresponds to the *Vita Graeca*, with the exception of an epilog and an introduction, that although lacking also in the Vatican manuscript and Ḥomṣ manuscripts, C. Bacha completed with the Kafr-Buhum manuscript.

The introduction, that it may be discarded as original if we consider the copy from Poemen, the Vatican manuscript from 1223, the original version, has a great interest, since it is here where Michael tells us the reasons of writing the Life and give us the date of 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1084 as the day of the Turkish invasion under command of Sulaymān b. Quṭlumīš and the liberation of the prisoners thanks to the prayers to the saints of the day, St. John and St. Barbara, being that the reason for his effort to compile the news on St. John's Life, until then all of them dispersed.

But, as mentioned before, if this epilog does not belong to the original version, and Michael has appropriated the original version as his own, the problem of the original version of St. John's Life is solved and C. Bacha would be right to entitle his edition of this *Vita Arabica* as the original version.

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31) Review in AB 33 (1914) 78-81.

32) Also in GRAF, *Vita*, p. 166.

Finally, just to indicate the existence of another manuscript that has not been known by C. Bacha, Georg Graf<sup>33</sup> uses for his German translation of Constantine Bacha's *Vita Arabica* an incomplete manuscript of the Life of St. John that it was found in the Jesuit Library, *Beirut Bibliothèque Orientale* 51, a Codex from the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>34</sup>. G. Graf annotates the differences existing with C. Bacha's Arabic edition<sup>35</sup>.

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33) GRAF, *Vita*, pp. 167-8.

34) I think it is rather the MS *Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale* 617 (A.D. 1697) fol. 120<sup>v</sup>-137<sup>r</sup> (= pp. 236-269), which was used by GRAF, *Vita*, p. 320-331 (SAMIR).

35) We may add (SAMIR) that at least five other manuscripts are available today:

*Aleppo, Fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem, Sbath* 1112 (16<sup>th</sup> c.) 4<sup>th</sup> text; I do not mention the MSS *Sbath Fihris* 2328: the information is not reliable.

*Gotha Arabic* 2882 (16<sup>th</sup> c.) fol. 63<sup>r</sup>-79<sup>r</sup>;

*Sinai Arabic* 317 (A.D. 1223, written by Poemen, like *Vatican Arabic* 79);

*Sinai Arabic* 448 (13<sup>th</sup> c.) fol. 10<sup>v</sup>-17<sup>r</sup>.

## B. ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE ARABIC LIFE OF SAINT JOHN OF DAMASCUS

What led and incited me to write and compile the biography of our father St. John of Damascus the Just, the Priest, for surname “Gold Stream” – God be merciful to us – was the following:

Sulaymān b. Quṭlumish<sup>36</sup> took over the city of Great Antioch by surprise, from its Eastern side, from the Eastern mountain called al-Qīṭaqīl. That was on Sunday, the first of Kānūn al-Awal, of the eighth era, the year 6593 of the world (1084 AD).

In a period of three days he took over the city, and no inhabitants remained in it, but they fled to the mountain to take refuge in the citadel.

That day, Tuesday, I, myself, unworthy servant Michael, monk and priest, was in the city. Fleeing from the invaders I went to hide in a dark house. For the will of God I was hidden from their views and I was saved. When it was night and I saw the city empty of inhabitants, fear and terror took possession of me. I was suffering because I had stayed, because I didn't go up to the mountain with the people of my city.

Then, at midnight, I went up to the mountain, until I arrived at the gate of the citadel around noon time. While I tried to enter it, a group of people from the city, riding horses, went out. A Turkish detachment from Ḥiṣn Artāḥ<sup>37</sup>, to whom they had asked for help, went with them. They had paid them a big amount of dinars so that they would help them to fight against Sulaymān, the enemy. They galloped down the hill.

While I went cautiously, turning from right to left, into the citadel, I saw them coming back, fleeing defeated from the Turkish of Sulaymān who followed them.

At that precise moment the Turkish detachment urged all who were on the wall, the mountain, the citadel and its surroundings: men, women, children, together with their horses and mules, to go down.

I was in the group of captives. I blamed myself for my lack of courage. Always, when I remember such a sad event I cry with copious tears, because that was a great disaster like never before had happened, and even less in such a quick way.

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36) Founder of the Seljuk State of Rum (Asia Menor). In order to escape from the tyranny of Malik-Shah, the Christians from Antioch secretly invited Suleyman on 17 December 1084 and gave the city over to him. As a result of his expansionist policy and siege of Aleppo he lost his life and his army on 6 June 1086. LAMBTON, A.K. et alii (ed.) *Cambridge History of Islam*, 1, p.236.

37) Artāḥ fortress is located in the province of Aleppo. YĀQŪT, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, 1, p. 190.



When their men urged us to go down the mountain and we were dismayed and despaired of being able to save our lives, I remembered what date it was. It was Wednesday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of the mentioned month. On that day, people of Antioch commemorated the feast of Saint Barbara with great joy and delight, dressing in their most luxurious clothes, riding dromedaries and mules, attending Saint Barbara Church: the knights with the Patriarch, the people of the Church, the Governor (*wālī*) and his Ministers.

I asked for her intercession, I prayed to her and commended my petition, also, to he who shared with her the worship that same day of her feast, I mean, Father St. John of Damascus, the Priest. I prayed and invoked him all my way down from the mountain, for his zeal in the Christian religion. I prayed for the people, that God through his prayers and intercessions will protect them in this misfortune that had happened and save them. I prayed until we arrived to a meadow and we sat down on the ground.

Then, people called and shouted in a loud voice, saying that Sulaymān had liberated the captive people of the city, so that they were able to go back to their houses in peace without fear.

All gave thanks to God, blessing His name, because He had had consideration for them, at that moment of the day, with His clement look and His secret and kind solicitude.

It was a clear sign of the Just's mercy – be praised – who leaves exhausted the tongues proclaiming His attributes.

When the year passed and the day of the two festivities arrived, I mean, the feast of St. Barbara and St. John, the second year in the month of Kānūn al-Awal, I asked willing to listen to the biography of St. John. However, I knew from a group of people that there was no complete biography, neither in Greek nor Arabic. I was astonished of how negligence was able to overcome the people of his time so that they did not mention him, his dignity, honor, virtue and integrity being so prominent over others. Besides that, his verses had been sung by the Christian community, for a long time, night and day, when they gathered in the Church.

I did not find anyone who could tell me the reason of this lack of news about him.

I had heard some disconnected biographical news and I found some very cut down written memories in a summary of biographies of the Fathers of his time, in addition to some incomplete fragments. I gathered all of this, omitting some of them, because I did not find these sections corresponding to the original<sup>38</sup>. In that way I have composed only one continuous biography.

Whoever will read it has to excuse me because I venture to do something that

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38) GRAF wonders how to understand this sentence. He may be speaking of an original version.

surpassed my capability. I went beyond what the savants who preceded me have done, and they were more capable than I, in this and other things.

Nevertheless, I decided to undertake this task because I realized the usefulness that will come for me from this. For that reason I have compiled all news that were easy to gather, which is a little bit of the huge existing amount<sup>39</sup>.

God will recompense to each one according to his capacity and effort. To Him the glory for ever. Amen.

\* \* \*

The majority of those who want the biographies of religious men and holy fathers, whose memories about their dignity spread through other virtuous people and masters – as columns for the solid temple founded on the rock of the orthodox faith and the jewelry of the true religion –, do not find anything better nor more sublime than the study of their biographies, which are of extreme spiritual and material delight and sweetness.

This is especially true, after having passed a long time without a biography of these saints that in an orderly way, written in a document, will sound in the ears of the believers and the Christian community, gathered to commemorate the feast of these saints.

In addition to that, the biographies are told from one to another, in few words, by mean of listening and memorizing. For that reason the news are interrupted in the middle of the delight and sweet pleasure, and there is no base for inquiring after it. They are just like scattered jewels that are found in different and opposite places. But if these spread and scattered pearls and precious stones are compiled, until they become an ordered collar where one follows the other, then the eyes look out for the sight of it and the hearts anxiously demand to hear from the beginning to the end, because this is more valuable for them than the precious jewel and the glorious power.

One of the most magnificent saints of influence and rank is St. John of Damascus, whom we commemorate at this time, well known by the surname "Gold Stream"<sup>40</sup>. He has adorned the temples of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Most High, praised Our Lady the Virgin, Our Mother, with melodies, can-

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39) I wonder if this is a rhetorical sentence or if he contradicts himself with regard to the lack of news.

40) As early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century Theophanes the Chronographer bestows upon him the epithet of Golden-stream, probably as an allusion to the river bearing this name in Damascus, but it also betoken the elegance of his style, the purity of his doctrine and the splendor of his virtues. C. TSIRPANLIS, "The saint's message", in *Orthodox Thought and Life* 4, 1987.

ons<sup>41</sup>, and other kind of artistic songs which people of the orthodox churches enjoy in the festivity of saints and martyrs.

Besides, he has a big number of literary works, refutations to the doubtful and disobedient people. On the edge of his tongue he always had the books of the Old and New Testament, having studied also foreign sciences, logic and philosophy.

Qozma<sup>42</sup>, the Blessed, whose memory and biography have been divulged, bishop of Māyūmā, has shared in the majority of the writings and compositions of the saint. The reason for this is that both shared education and life, since they were brought up in the same house, the house of John's father, and both followed the same high ascetic and monastic lives.

St. John was born and brought up in the city of Damascus. He was the son of Manṣūr, well known by Ibn Sarḡūn, the honorable, who occupied a high rank among his fellow citizens, and who had the reins of the administration in his hands, as basileus, in other words, Governor of the locality and administrator of its wealth.

He characterized himself for his upright honor and blessed religion, afraid of God the Most High, fulfilling His commandments, abundant in wisdom and lover of science.

For that reason, for the will of God, he looked after the education of his son John, until he raised him up to the highest rank in science, by means of master Qozma's<sup>43</sup> teaching, the monk and Calabrian philosopher.

Do not think, oh listener, that this is Qozma, the bishop of Māyūmā<sup>44</sup>, brought up with John, in the house of his father, just because it is the same name. This is another Qozma, an older one, an expert in science, and from whom both learned all their philosophy.

Qozma, the Calabrian, arrived in the city of Damascus in a large group of prisoners captured by Gazat al-Baḥr from some foreign ships, and who went to be enslaved and sold.

41) One of the main forms of Byzantine liturgical office, consisting of 9 odes, based on the 9 biblical Canticles of the Eastern Christian Church.

42) The Young. See below footnote.

43) The life of Cosmas the teacher has been developed more in the Greek version of St. John's life, sometimes as a monk others as an asekretis. In some version the name of Cosmas the Elder is lacking. But what it is more surprising is the silence of St. John about his teacher.

44) Near Gaza, in south Palestine. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, s.v. *S. Jean Damascène*.

The slaves of a low price, were to be sold, but killed. Everyone who was sentenced to death first went to Qozma, the monk, the Calabrian philosopher, who had been imprisoned and enslaved with them.

They fell down to his feet asking him to remember them in his petitions and prayers so that they could obtain the patience and necessary strength in that moment of difficulty and obtain forgiveness for the other life.

When Gazat al-Baḥr saw him in such a dignified and natural disposition and saw his preeminence among the other slaves, he asked him:

Are you the Christian patriarch? Is it for that reason that you have obtained this high and great position among them?

He answered:

I am not the patriarch nor a leader, I am a humble monk-philosopher.

Giving this answer, his eyes poured abundant tears.

When Maṣṣūr, John's father, saw him in this state, crying and mourning, he hurried up to him without delay and said to him:

What makes you cry, oh man!, when your clothing speaks of your asceticism in the world?

He answered:

I don't cry for the life of this world and its worries, its many inconstancies and sadness, but for the loss of the science that I have learned since my tender childhood. I made an effort all my life to study it without enjoying it and without the reward of having taught to whom implore mercy to God for me after my death.

Maṣṣūr asked him:

Where have you arrived in the knowledge of science?

He said:

I have studied and memorized all of it. None of it is hidden to me.

When Maṣṣūr listened to that, he stood up and hurried to the Emir, asking him for the slave. Then he took him to his house and alleviated his heart with this words:

Now, you are not a slave but free and the servant of God. You are welcome to my house, to share all my goods and properties. I make you equal in all to me, but I would ask you to teach my son John, son of my flesh, and Qozma<sup>45</sup> of Je-

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45) Kosma the Hymnographer (674-52) is a well known figure in the history of Byzan-

rusalem<sup>46</sup>, spiritual son, orphaned by his parents, the science that you have mentioned.

He answered:

I listen and obey your orders, my Lord.

And he started to teach both of them, staying with them day and night. The nature of both was blessed and they learned from him all sciences, attaining a high degree in them, in a short period. They studied grammar, philosophy, astronomy and geometry, without leaving a book that they did not study and memorize. They were educated according to the Greek system, immersing themselves, also, in the Holy Book, as it should be.

The virtues of both were evident for all who knew them. And for those who would desire to prove what we have said and to know the perfection of both in all sciences, it is possible also. They will know how wise and pure they were if they read their songs, canons and writings.

However, they wished a more sublime and virtuous way of life which comprised the monastic cloth and embraced its light.

But we will explain this at its moment. Let us go back to what we were saying.

When the science of these men surpassed that of Qozma, the monk-philosopher, he said to his master Manṣūr:

John, your son, and also, Qozma, have learned all science, now they do not know a bit less than I do. For that reason, I ask you to release me so that I can go to Jerusalem, to prostrate myself in the Holy Places, and, with God's help, I will stay in the monastery of St. Saba, to consecrate myself to God and to serve Him the rest of my life.

I will pray for you for I am thankful to you for your virtues and good works.

Manṣūr answered:

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tine literature. Recently, Th. E. DETORAKES has attempted to write his biography on the basis of the relatively abundant material. He was bishop of Maiouma, adoptive brother of St. John of Damascus and with him a fighter of iconoclasm. St. John dedicates his *Dialectics* to him. Scholars don't arrive to a conclusion about the authorship of the hymns attributed to him, which can also be attributed to St. John and viceversa. See KAZHDAN- GERO. About his work see A. KAZHDAN, "Kosmas of Jerusalem. Can we speak of his political view?", in *Le Muséon*, 103 (1990) 329-46.

46) Al-Ūrūṣalīmī. GRAF pointed out the Greek origin of the name as a hint that proves the existence of a Greek original to this Arabic version.

Your departure from us makes me feel sorrow and my sadness for having you far away is without limits. But if you ask to be joined to God – praise to Him – leaving us and separating yourself from us, I do not have any way to prevent it. Go in peace, and remember your prayers.

He left him to go according to his wish, providing him with all he needed.

Qozma, the Calabrian, joined the monastery of St. Saba, as his desire was, and stayed there until the hour of his death.

After that Maṣṣūr died, and his son John became secretary of the Emir of the country. St. John occupied a prominent place, he knew the Emir's secret and public life, his orders and prohibitions.

At that time, Qusṭanṭīn al-Zabīlī<sup>47</sup>, whose name was Ibn Lāun al-Ayṣūrī, fought the divine icons, when he was made sovereign of Constantinople. He disturbed all Churches, deviating the orthodox of the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Most High, destroying His holy icons and the icons of His Mother the Virgin, and the icons of all saints. He detested the theologians of God – praised be His name –, I mean, the monks of ascetic life and angelic behavior, whom he called “dressed with the darkness of shadows”.

The noble and wise John was not negligent concerning his zeal for the faith and true and upright teaching. So although he was not given positions, seeds nor presidencies in the Holy Church, he was known for his letters, which were sent to all regions, the nearest and the furthest, to reinforce all Churches and to support the blessed religion in the worship of the holy icons by means of apologetic writings and intense warnings, quoting the best words of St. Basilio the Great, who says that whoever honors an icon, also honors its prototype<sup>48</sup>.

When Lāun<sup>49</sup>, the King, who despised the holy icons, had news of St.

47) Constantine V Copronymus (b.718-d.775). Byzantine emperor from 741, son of Leo III the Isaurian. Coruler with his father since 720. He spent most of his life in warfare against Arabs and Bulgars, who threatened the empire. Strong Iconoclast, he persecuted who opposed his position. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 6 (1965), p. 47a-47b.

48) St. Basil the Great. From his Commentary on Isaiah. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine images*, p.92.

49) Leo the Isaurian (675-741), Byzantine emperor (717-41), who founded the Isaurian, or Syrian, dynasty, successfully resisted Arab invasions, and engendered a century of conflict within the empire by banning the use of religious images. He seized the Byzantine throne with help of the Arabs, who believed that he would deliver the empire to them. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 13 (1965), p. 959a-959b.

John's pure and intelligent actions and read his writings, he crunched all his teeth like a wild board. He plotted against him resorting to the following trick:

He called the secretaries of the *Dīwān* and showed to them some of John's writings. He ordered him to imitate his writing in whole perfection. They imitated his expressions and wrote a letter where he was writing to the king on his initiative. In this writing he was clearly giving advise, concerned as he was for the Christian religion, saying:

Most of the countries of the district of al-Šām<sup>50</sup> are militarily empty, without any defense against the enemy that would intend to penetrate it, and without obstacle to stop those who wanted to take it over. That it was an easy goal to those who wanted to occupy it.

He wrote these and similar things.

The king ordered also to write another letter to the Emir of Damascus saying:

In order to confirm the love and agreement (*sulh*) existing between us, and hating to break the pact upon which our reconciliation is established, I send to you a letter that has arrived to our Kingdom. It is a letter from your secretary John, in which he encourages us to attack your country taking advantage of the lack of guardians so that it becomes an easy goal for those who want to occupy it. If you read the letters and verify them, you will know the purity of our affection to you and how much we honor the dignity of your rank. Peace.

A messenger was sent with the letter of the evil king together with the forged letter of John the Happy.

When the committee arrived before the Emir, the two letters were presented to him, but in a way that these letters could not arrive to John's hands, so that he could hide them.

The Emir called John and he presented to him his letter with his falsified handwriting saying:

"Do you know, John, this handwriting and this letter?"

He answered:

Oh Emir, the writing looks like my handwriting, but it is not mine. And what is said there, it has been not pronounced by my mouth. This letter has not passed through my hands at any moment and my eyes have not seen it but in this very moment that I am before you.

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50) Siro-Palestine region of the Islamic empire.

The Emir gave to him the letter of the King of Byzantium and John read it. When he finished, the Emir sentenced to cut his hand immediately.

John implored before him very much, asking many times that he would be given time to discover the ruse for which the king was sending the letter.

But the Emir did not listen a word from him neither gave him the possibility to defense himself any longer. On the contrary, he ordered to cut his right hand and hang it in the center of the city of Damascus.

When the evening arrived, John sent to him a message saying:

Oh Emir, I have pain in my hand! Since it is hanged in the air, the pain does not calm down. I think that if you give it to me to bury in the dust, perhaps this pain will calm down a little.

The Emir ordered to give to him the cut hand. When this was given to him, he went into his room and fell down to the ground before the icon of the glorious Virgin, intercessor never refused. He put his cut hand joined to his arm and he prayed from his deep heart. He cried with burning tears falling above his breast and said:

Oh Saint Lady and Pure Mother of our God, Eternal Word, who was incarnated in your pure blood for your great love to mankind! I ask you to implore and intercede for me before Him because of my sadness and pain. He knows my misfortune and what has happened to me because of the fighters of icons, to whom I have denounced in public their lies and errors of beliefs, because of my love and faith in God our Lord Jesus Christ, the Living and Eternal One. But the Enemy of mankind has conspired against me and it was ordered to cut my hand. Now I have extended to you so that you will put it as it was before, healthy, complete and healed of the cut and pain. Manifest upon your servant your great tenderness so that my tongue will not cease proclaiming your praise! Because you have power on what I have asked for the strength incarnated in you, the Creator of all Creation, its Chief and Administrator, who deserves praise for ever and ever. Amen.

When he implored in this way, with burning heart, his eyes poured copious tears. Then his eyes dried out and he saw the tender mother in her physical shape, looking at him, and she said:

I have healed your hand, so go and fulfill your promise to God, do not delay. Stand up with joy, praying and giving thanks. Sing now, as it is appropriated, because He has quickly answered to your petition and he has healed you immediately, like the well known miracles of old times.

He stayed in his house giving thanks to God the Most High, praying all night, and proclaiming the splendid miracles and His flowering graces.



But this event did not remained hidden to his enemies and the Emir was informed that it was not John's hand which had been cut but someone else's hand. Obviously he had bribed the official, because he had stayed happily at home.

The Emir made him to come. When he saw the scar of the cut in his hand, he was amazed and asked:

Who is the doctor who has healed you and what have you used to heal?

John answered in a loud and amazing voice that surpassed the admonition:

My Savior is an expert physician. He has power to do whatever He wants. For that, it was not difficult for Him to heal me. On the contrary, he hurried up to lead to a good end my case.

The Emir said to him:

In my opinion, you are innocent of the accusation raised against you. We apologize for that assumption and for having hurried up in the decision. Go back to your service and position. From today on we will not be in disagreement with your orders, neither oppose your opinion nor your advice.

John prostrated before him, with his body on the ground, remaining in this position a long time. He asked him to be excepted and free to follow the way of the Lord, that that he had chosen and was satisfactory for him. After a lot of effort and pain he let him free.

At that moment, he spent his time at home sharing the most part of his wealth with the poor and needy people. After that, he left walking for Jerusalem and went to the monastery of St. Saba, in companion of Qozma, the one brought up in his father's house, sharing with him science and education.

In both of them there was the wish to follow a way of more dignity and virtue, that included the habit of the honorable monasticism and the embracing of its delicate and good light.

When John asked the superior of the monastery to live in it and become a monk, the latter was very glad about his arrival and praised his efforts very much.

For his high position and honor he wanted that an old monk of all virtues would be encharged of initiating him in the monastic life, for the dignity that he deserved and was suitable for him. So that he would teach him

the monastic life without effort following the method of the Saint Fathers and ascetics.

But the monk asked a dispensation from the superior and asked the task to be commended to another one.

When the superior talked to the majority of the old monks about his wish, they did not agree but argued:

This man is a man of high dignity, virtue and rank. He can not humiliate himself to our orders nor obey our prescriptions. We ask you to dispense all of us from it.

Then his issue was deleted. When his stay in the monastery prolonged, one old, innocent, and spiritual monk came to him and said: I will look after him.

Then the superior delivered him to this monk.

When he went with him to his cell, the old monk began to instruct him saying:

The only condition, my son, is that you must throw away all vanities and wrong desires of the world. Whatever you see I do, do it yourself. Do not be vain for all the science that you have learned, for the monastic and ascetic life is not inferior to it, but, on the contrary, the most honorable life regarding rank and philosophy. Wish to put an end to your passions and do whatever annoys your satisfaction. Do not do anything without my approval and without consultation. Do not write letters to anyone. What you have learned of worldly sciences neither pronounce nor mention it.

John inclined his head and prostrated before him, he promised to fulfill his orders and advices.

After a long time in the monastery, his master wanted to prove his obedience and know what was the limit of his virtue. He said to him:

Son, it has been reported to me that our works, the baskets, are requested in Damascus. We have many of them here, so go to the city and sell them and bring whatever the cost is to cover our needs and expenses.

He gave him this task and prescribed to him the double of the real price so that it would not be easy for him to sell them quickly and successfully.

When he arrived to Damascus and took a place in the market with the baskets, nobody bought them by any chance, for the price was excessive in comparison to what was their real price.

A young man, who was his servant before, saw him and recognized him

but he did not show it. His heart was breaking apart at his sight and, having compassion for him, paid all the price that he was asking for. John took the money and went back to his master, dressing the crown of victory, defeating the Devil of arrogance and pride.

On one occasion an old monk, neighbor of his master, died. He had a carnal brother who was very sad for the separation and did not stop crying and mourning constantly every time he remembered him.

He asked Father John to compose a troparion<sup>51</sup> to console his sadness, to comfort himself and be occupied reading it so that he would be able to forget his useless mourning.

John answered prudently:

I keep the order of my master and what he prescribed to me at the beginning of my monastic life.

The monk who had inquired about that said:

No one except me will know that.

Then he composed the troparion that still is sung nowadays at funerals. They are kind, tender, fresh, flowering verses. The beginning of which is this:

“In reality all things are vain and perishable”.

John began to sing and complete the hymn when his master heard him, for he was reciting in a loud voice.

He said:

Is this what I have ordered you? Did I order you to sing instead of crying?

He explained to him the matter with the monk, his neighbor, and he asked him for permission to do it.

He answered:

You are not satisfied in my house, go away from my view.

John went away very sad and asked the old monks in the monastery to inquire before his master to be allowed to be back with him and to be forgiven.

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51) Short hymn or stanza of the Eastern Christian Church.

When the old monks went to his master, he did not accept the petition.

Then one of them said:

You have a rule that allows you to punish him, accept our petition and forgive his fault.

He said to them:

Allright, if he washes the excrements of the old people and his obedience is manifested through this work I will allow him to go back to his cell.

They went back sad and ashamed.

When John saw them, he received them and, prostrating before them, he began to ask about his master's order.

They answered:

We did not expect to find so much difficulty in convincing your master. He has answered with a rule that we never have heard nor known.

He asked:

What is the rule?

They answered:

To wash the excrements of the old people.

He said with the readiness of obedience and the beauty of his moral perfection:

This is very easy.

He took a rake and a large basket at that very moment and began to clean starting from the contiguous cell to his and his master's.

When the old monk saw the quickness of his action and his great obedience, he went to him at that very moment without allowing him to complete his work. He grasped him with his hands, kissed his hands and eyes, saying:

Be satisfied, my son, be satisfied. You have been obedient and more than that. No more virtue is necessary. Go free and satisfied to your cell, with the most dignity and composure.

After some days Our Lady appeared to his master in dreams and said:

Why do you hinder the source and impede it to run with all its power. John is prepared to beautify the churches, to adorn the feasts of the saints with his songs so that all believers will sing with sweet verses. Let him free so that he can say whatever he wants for the powerful Spirit speaks through his tongue.

When the morning came, the old monk said to John:

My Son, if from now on you want to say something, nothing impedes you to say it! God is pleased with it, He even desires it, for He is the one who makes your mouth open. Say what He dictates to you. My interdiction was because of my stupidity and ignorance.

Then John began to write the canons of the Resurrection, sticherarion<sup>52</sup> and troparions.

Qozma, the Blessed, did as he. So, both competed in how to express with their words stronger and more divine love. But they did not expose themselves to envy nor rivalry in all their lives.

Qozma, the Honorable, after staying a long period in the monastery of St. Saba, was requested by a group of bishops from Jerusalem to be invested bishop of the city of Māyūmā, known today as Maymas<sup>53</sup>. He behaved well and satisfactorily before God, he was a good shepherd who led his people for the Savior's path. When he reached an old age he went to His Lord.

As for John, the patriarch of Jerusalem<sup>54</sup> called him, and he was ordained priest against his will, but because of the patriarch's persistency.

When he went back to the monastery, he increased his asceticism and works. He concentrated on his writings, which would eventually reach the most remote inhabited places.

One of them is the story of Barlaam and Josaphat<sup>55</sup>, where he shows all human and divine wisdom.

Others writings are about "The uprightous faith", "the Incarnation of the Eternal Word", and his condemnation of the enemies and fighters of icons and other schismatic. If those who love science consult them they will find still today the righteousness of his words, the strength of his expressions and his zeal in the Christian religion.

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52) Hymns proper for each day of the church year in the Byzantine rite. *Encyclopedia Britanica*, s.v. "Byzantine chant".

53) A harbor of Gaza. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century had its episcopal see. The town under the name of Mimas has been known to oriental authors. See KAZHDAN-GERO, p.125.

54) *Al-Balad al-Muqaddas*.

55) Version of the biography of Buda very popular in medieval Europe. The figure of this biography came to be recognized as a Christian saint.

I will bring a witness of what has been said. Without any doubt, his witness will be useful, because he is St. Stephen the New<sup>56</sup>, confessor of icons in the Kingdom of Cunștanțin al-Zabilî:

Constantine, the Bad, wished in extreme way to deter Stephen the Just from his firm opinion about the cult of icons. However, he could not make him change his opinion, and for that reason he used all kinds of tricks and ruses against him. Since Stephen remained steadfast in his affirmations, the king ordered his exile to one of the islands<sup>57</sup>.

This happened after his first exile and before being imprisoned in Abrațun<sup>58</sup>. During the latter he met 340 imprisoned priests, all of whom had scars, horrible cuts, bruises, and signs of torture because of their worship of icons.

When he had been in exile for a long time on that island<sup>59</sup>, the superiors of the monastery and monks of the most beautiful worship went to him. They were from Europe, Byzantium, Abyssinia, its districts, and from the regions of Abrūșiya<sup>60</sup>.

All of them presented themselves to Stephen, the blessed, as the dear father and faithful censor that he was, asking him to give them prescriptions and advice for salvation. But great sadness had taken over him in his exile and he was pouring abundant tears for the people of the Church. They asked him to give them a ruling and a sign for salvation.

Then they said to him:

Tell us, father, our duty, because we are immersed in uncertainty.

When the Blessed saw the fathers who had come in crowd to him, he embraced their angelic white hair<sup>61</sup>. He said:

Sons and honorable brothers, there is nothing more honorable than the firm

56) According to BACHA, we find his biography in a periodical of the Greek Patriarchy, Ed. Migne, pp.1113-1118. GRAF, *Vita*, 185, n. 8, tells us that he died as victim of iconoclasm in 767 and gives the following reference for the location of this text, *Vita S. Stephani Junioris*, 808, see PG 100, 1069-1185.

57) GRAF, *Vita*, p.186, n.1, identifies the island as Prokonessos in Propontis.

58) GRAF, *Vita*, p.186 translates this as Prison of the Pretorium.

59) GRAF, *Vita*, p.186, n. 6 points out that the following conversation takes place not in the island where the Saint was in exile but in the Saint's cell, in Mount Aurentuis.

60) We think this is Abruzzi, region of central Italy, fronting the Adriatic Sea and in parallel to Rome. It was part of the Byzantine Empire, and later under Lombard rule. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1 (1965), p. 47a-47b.

61) Meaning here honorability.

decision of worshipping icons and nothing stronger than a soul that does not want to serve badness. I am convinced by your good intention that you are prudent in everything. You became for me sign and guide. For I have cried because of the destruction of the sons of my race. He said with Jeremiah the prophet: "Because I see the bridegroom, the Lord, surrounded by cruelty and bitterness because of the evil, deceiving Devil, fighter of our nature from old time". The majority of my tears and mourning are because of the fog that is placed over the shepherds and parishioners.

When Stephen the Just had said this and other things, in the assembly of magnificent monks who had come and talked to him, beating their hearts and who were bathed in tears, he talked like this:

I point out for you that there are 3 regions that do not agree with that impure doctrine. Go there, for there is no other places submitted to the obedience of this rebel, obeying his orders and words.

They said:

Where are these countries in order to go there?

He answered:

The districts<sup>62</sup> in the region of Pont Euxin (Auksantius Pontūs)<sup>63</sup>, the adjacent district of Crimea (Sharsūna)<sup>64</sup>, the district of Parthenicum (Batāniqūn)<sup>65</sup> and the neighboring region of the gulf al-Qabli<sup>66</sup>, the lower part of old Rome, towards the district of the river Tiber and towards Lycia (Lūkiya)<sup>67</sup>, the low sea, and the rest toward the coasts and the island of Cyprus, Tripoli<sup>68</sup>, Tyre (Šūr)<sup>69</sup> and Jaffa<sup>70</sup>.

We do not need to speak of the lords of the main sees, Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, who not only were opposed to burning icons but who also blamed and condemned the iconoclasts. They did not stop sending letters debasing their beliefs and blaming the hypocritical and heretical king for this impure doctrine. They called him apostate, leader of the schism and so on.

In addition to that, John of Damascus, who excels in dignity, had been called by

62) I found difficult the translation of this paragraph and the identification of the geographical names. I am not sure if it is correct.

63) In the region of the Black Sea. We have based the identification of this and the following geographical names in the C. BASHA's notes, chekt in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

64) Named in antiquity Chersonese.

65) Name of a region in Sicily, non existing today.

66) This gulf may be the sea between Sicily and Naples.

67) District of S.W. Anatolia.

68) Today city in Lebanon.

69) Today city in Lebanon.

70) Today city in Israel.

the rebel tyrant, "the Marmor"<sup>71</sup>, while for us he is pure, just, and clothed in dress of divinity.

St. John did not stop writing, calling him leader of the deridibles and perplexed, burner of icons and hater of sanctuaries. He called the bishops, who were in favor of the king servants of their wombs and believers in their bowels. They were especially the lovers of horse races and theater, in other words, al-Bastilās and al-Trikākāfās<sup>72</sup>, for Nacolie<sup>73</sup> and Aḡsikijūs. He called them Zayb and Zaba<sup>c</sup>, the New, Ṣalmānā, and Dāshān, and compared their followers to the companions of Abirūn<sup>74</sup>.

When Stephen, the Blessed, had said these and other words useful for the soul, the fathers mourned and cried as they said good-bye. They kissed him, bade farewell and went to the places of emigration, places of salvation. They went there not because they were afraid of martyrdom, but because of the perfidy of the rebel and their lack of experience, for whoever doesn't have experience does not become an expert.

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The effort, in relation to the saint icons and the orthodox religion of father John, the Just, reached such an extent, that he became a threat to the kings, the prominent priests and hierarchy, for his brilliant zeal and the orthodoxy of his belief. But he was praised for his virtues in all distant countries, and became a model, whose path is followed, because of his great work and effort.

O group of lovers of Christ! We should now praise his name which deserves all human and divine praise.

At no moment his useful words that make the believers rejoice have been refrained. Frequently they spring from an abundant and copious fountain, sweeter than honey that drops from the honey comb and of a most pleasant taste. Because his compositions are suitable for any place, any meaning, any requirement, with rare exceptions, and they are well known for the clarity of composition.

When he became old, full of fruitful and high virtues, he stopped composing works and passed away to Christ, his lover, in whom his soul rested.

71) In Arabic *Mrmr*. G. GRAF mentions the possibility that this would be a misreading of the word Manseros, the Greek version of Maṣṣūr with a double meaning, that of bastard.

72) Name of the two groups of horse races in Constantinople. Cf. C. BASHA.

73) Bishop Constantine and Bishop Thomas. Cf. C. BASHA.

74) We did not find any data to identify this person.



He went to live in the Kingdom of Heaven, where the high enlightened celestial dwellings are, full of all joy, because they reach to the attributes of the Trinity, the sanctification of the cherubs, the hallelujahs of the seraphims, with praise and glory.

I ask, oh father St. John, the Just, to intercede for my dwelling, to accept my lack of knowledge and skill in this simple story that brings some news about your many and great virtues.

I did not report all the news, but I gathered from the books small and scattered parts that I have found, together with the news about the fathers of your time, in addition to those faithful transmissions of the biography to which I have listened to several times.

I put order in them and they became a unified and similar poem with a spiritual function for those who want to become nourished by it and benefited from its study. Besides that, whoever reads it will benefit because of its great usefulness and will know till what point reaches the rank of your philosophy and your extreme importance.

Nevertheless, I have tried with all my desire and I have struggled willing that this story, simple and scarce, of the humble servant, will be studied in the day of your memorable day, today, 4 of Kānūn al-Awwal, so that every year your joyful and honorable feast will be abundant of praises and glory of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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